

Session 7A: Ecosystem Science and Stewardship

Questions & Answers

Todd Hass

Q: How do you deal with the problem of volunteer turnover, attrition and maybe the fact that people, for whatever reason, may not be able to go out on a consistent basis? And then a related question, have you dealt with the issues of quality assurance and quality control of the data?

A: We are just finishing our first year in the study, we have had 12 volunteers in Ocean Shores and roughly 10 or 11 of them have stayed with us, a couple have dropped out due to health reasons. We have been pretty successful at getting them to go out on a routine basis. We ask that people to go out every month or so, but some of them go out every two weeks. So far, attrition has been pretty slight, but Mary Sue Broncato is our volunteer coordinator on the north coast of Washington, and I try to keep in touch with people on the southern, central coast and Oregon, and it takes just a bit of communication at a regular interval to encourage them to keep up with the pace. We have also implemented online data entry, which eliminates the need for us to do quite so much data entry and interpretation of handwriting. In fact, it's the University of Washington. It also allows us to smart-check our data toward the second part of your question. The measurements are smart-checked online so we go to the web site, we enter in our data, and if you choose a specific foot type then the candidates that will come up on the next page are only those candidates with the foot type, so we limit the number of candidates and we also, after that stage, if the measurements are entered and they fall outside the range for the species, we alert the user to that and so they either enter that information because they think that maybe the bird was in molt or the measurements may have been off for some other reason or they can reevaluate and see whether their identification might not be correct.

Q: Have you considered melding in with existing Beach Watcher programs? Because I know at the Port Townsend Marine Science Center, we've had Beach Waters for about 10 or 12 years, but of course they have not gotten the detail that you have here. But they do notice both living and dead birds?

A: We are trying to coordinate with Adopt a Beach which maintains a beach bird survey program for the Puget Sound area in the late 80s early 90s, and I have been communicating with Don Norman about reconciling our data sets so that they complement one another and hopefully we can bring in some of those observers from that program into our own.

Q: How do you go about recruitment and how many hours of training do the volunteers get and have you considered using high school student or middle school students for this?

A: We have recruited people just by getting out the word to local communities especially Audubon chapters. I was given 12 names at that initial setup in Ocean Shores, and I called all 12. All 12 showed up and except for the health reasons, they have all stayed with us. We've done similar things and Mary Sue could probably speak to some of that, and here she comes. Mary Sue addressed the question. On quality control, we also take photographs, we have the volunteers take photographs, so it's our key mechanism for knowing whether the bird was identified correctly or not besides the data sheet. And then for high school kids, we do have some high school students involved. A little bit of a problem on that is turnover, because they are not permanent residents for the long term, but also we have gotten recently involved in the STEP program with some of the Indian tribes and we are involving the coastal tribes in the program. With regard to the training, it doesn't take much time to get them to the basics. Within 2 to 3 hours just basic preparation in the scheme that I showed you just a little more elaborate, they can step through the field guide. I have done it in just one hour, I get people out on the beach and we put [them] out there with the field guide. After five minutes or so, they are asking us, What is this bird? We are reluctant to tell them off the bat. Five minutes later they do use the field guide and go through every step. They are telling us what it is and why they made that decision. So it's really impressive to see the light bulb just come on.

Q: Have you given some thought to contacting science teachers in the coastal areas and inviting them to the workshops? They would then be in a position to train their students every year.

A: Yes, we would love to see that. The limitation, so far, in the expansion of the program has been the development and integration of the field guide, and it's just been printed. We are hoping to put in volunteers hands and this will be the crux of getting reliable useful data, but to this point, we've only had these mini guides to provide our volunteers. And so we have wanted to not get too far ahead of ourselves, but at this point, we are ready to integrate.

Paul Schlenger

Q: How much of this effort is translated into critical areas ordinances and shoreline master program? Have they taken these into consideration? Are they using this information to create regulation that protects these areas?

A: That's a good question. I am not sure how far reaching these data are going to be applied. At this point, they are intended for the Whatcom County MRC and we are definitely encouraging and trying to provide the information to as many groups as are interested and hopefully it will be used in some of those ways.

Q: How do these objectives actually translate into action? You have a lot of good energy going, but how does it get real?

A: The first step is to really identify the objectives and need to start getting specific on if we are going to focus on areas to protect. To identify as marine protected areas you need specific objectives to then and go ahead and set out specific areas.

Q: After you have really specific objectives, how do those objectives actually turn into anything on the ground?

A: Objectives could even include focusing, prioritizing, restoring eelgrass versus conserving offshore reefs. Those different objectives more than fit into the hierarchy of the objectives are then going to translate into prioritization of the sites.

Andrea Copping

A: The Northwest Straits Conservation Initiative is fortunate enough to have congressional funds coming into our third year in a row. The NW Straits Commission assigns portions of those funds to each marine resource committee through a proposal process. They come to us with a proposal to do specific thing. Perhaps it's set up a marine protected area based on these kind of objectives, it may be less duration or increased level of protection for particular sites and part of the work that Paul and his colleague have been doing is that missing piece. We have been running on a little bit of, "Gee this seems like a good no brainer restoration site," but getting this kind of firm base of information allows us to know we are doing the right thing, so that's the "get real." And I think the previous question of how does this translate into ordinances and shoreline management, so it's really critical and it's hard for Paul or some of these other people to say it, because I [am] perfectly willing to say, these marine resource committee in most of the counties have very strong connections to county government, to their commissioners, to their councils and in many cases, becoming very influential advisors to county government which is kind of where the hole rubber meets the road.

Q: I would like a real honest appraisal of what the biggest challenge problem has been so far and since all of these MRCs are relatively new, in what way are you learning, all of you learning from each other?

A: I think the biggest challenge so far is the lack of recent data. As we compile the data efforts, we are looking back at WDFW fish and shellfish reports from the early 90s, things like that. I just think we need more information, and hopefully where we have compiled the information will help us to identify key areas to focus additional research. We have gotten a lot of positive feedback from other MRCs, and we are

hoping that next summer underway in developing the starting point of the data compilation for their efforts and some of those efforts are underway and some are getting jump started.

Andrea Copping

Q: On the theme of getting real are you starting with an assumption that your activities within your MRCs are voluntary or can they go to regulatory, will they be some place in between?

A: I think they are going to run the gambit, they are going to start as voluntary, but obviously the Northwest Straits Commission and the MRCs have no regulatory power, but by being county-based and citizen-based and involved with county government, it is the counties that have that opportunity to make the findings they deem relevant into regulation. And perhaps it can even go above the county level. But I think that what is happening here is a real grass roots effort to recognize what needs to be done and to gather the information and start to put that in place, so we are real hopeful that county government are going to see this as very positive and supportive of their missions.

Q: Are the MRCs sharing your GIS information to make kind of like a seamless database that others can draw on? Because if we are trying to develop a network of MPAs we are going to need that data contiguously instead of trying to work on a MRC-by-MRC basis. Is that process going on? Are you trying to share your information?

A: We are definitely trying to share, and we are open to folks who have requested it. **[Transcriber's Note: CHANGE OF TAPE OCCURRED IN MIDDLE OF ANSWER]** It contains a wonderful database of sediment chemistry basically if you go out and collect sediment chemistry data around the Sound and Ecology knows about it. You need [to] provide those data to Ecology, and then it's lumped into one big database called the SedQual database, and I'd like to see hopefully efforts are underway, I'm not familiar with any specifically, but then we start developing biological database along the same lines.

Tom Cowan

A: I can't help but jump in here. In fairness to Paul, he is a contractor for the Whatcom County MRCs, not a member of the MRC or representing the MRC. In answer to the coordination of efforts, there is a lot of coordination going on. In fact, the Skagit in Snohomish County MRCs are now in this phase and were just granted moneys to go ahead and take the same type of work that Whatcom County has developed and use the same kind of shoreline efforts in Skagit and Snohomish, so there is a lot of coordination going on. In terms of getting real, in Whatcom County the first effort was to do this mapping and the work that Anchor Environmental did, not they have a proposal that is being funded that will take that and after they have the summit that Paul described in the next couple of months, the results of that will be to prioritize specific restoration efforts so they needed this information to build on and now they will take that and apply it specific projects for restoration.

Q: How much money did it take to do the inventory work for Whatcom County?

A: A lot of the information was not digitized and we had to digitize quite a bit of GIS work, data manipulation. It was about a \$20,000 effort.

Jacques White

Q: I work for the nearshore habitat program we developed the shore zone data and this is more of a comment than a question. It's really great to see, the tool we designed is really a regional screening tool, and it's really great to see that integrated on the ground higher resolution citizen monitoring that will really complement the data.

Q: It sort of follows up on that. ShoreZone has the shoreline armoring data in their thing, and you were helping with some shoreline armoring surveys in Whatcom County? Is there a benefit to doing it both ways or is the ShoreZone data enough?

A: That was the example I probably should have done for this, but didn't but quickly explain it. The ShoreZone data is a variable shoreline length that is surveyed and the way they characterize armoring is 20

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percent within that particular area of shoreline and it could be three quarters of a mile, is armored. But you don't know where, and so what you would say is, "Gee, a section of shoreline that is characterized as sand and gravel, there is vegetative banks, and it's 20 percent armored, and we know there is forage fish spawning there or we think there could be is a good target." That's where you would go and do more specific work.